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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 002545

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SUBJECT: THE MECHANICS OF SELECTING THE NEXT ANC PRESIDENT

REF: PRETORIA 2122

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Don Teitelbaum
Reason 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: The question of who will be elected the next president of the ruling African National Congress (and almost certainly national President in 2009) is one that has been hotly debated, from township shebeens to the op-ed pages, since Jacob Zuma was fired as Deputy President one year ago. Despite the intense speculation, the selection of the party's next president and top leadership is not scheduled to take place for another 18 months. This message covers the mechanics of the succession process. Subsequent messages will address potential candidates and political developments as the process unfolds. Reftel addressed ANC rivalries and factions and their implications for the succession process. Much of the process, such as the selection of delegates and ranking of party lists, is seemingly mundane, but in reality may prove far more contentious than any ANC national conference since the end of apartheid. End summary.

THE MECHANICS OF ANC PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION

¶2. (C) Barring a change of date driven by ANC infighting (reftel), the ruling African National Congress is likely to choose its leadership through 2012 at its December 2007 national conference. The conference location has not yet been announced, but is rumored to be Polokwane in Limpopo province. At this conference, the party will elect its new president, who is expected to become the ANC's candidate in the 2009 national elections and almost certainly South Africa's next President. (Note: While there are no term limits for the ANC president, there is a constitutional two-term limit for the national President. Mbeki has categorically ruled out a constitutional amendment to overturn the national term limit, therefore if he wins a third term as ANC president, succession to South Africa's presidency will remain up in the air after 2007. End note) The ANC national conference also will elect the party's deputy president, secretary general, deputy secretary general, chairperson, and treasurer, as well as its 60-person National Executive Committee.

¶3. (C) The runup to the 2007 national conference will begin later this year, according to ANC elections researcher and IV nominee Wande Makalima. (Bio note: Makalima is the son of Mlungisi Makalima, South Africa's Ambassador to Zimbabwe and former Ambassador to Argentina.) Makalima noted that the first step will be provincial policy conferences, likely to be held in the second half of 2006. At these conferences, provincial ANC structures will examine the policy decisions made at the 2002 Mafikeng national conference, review progress made toward those aims, and debate new policy

recommendations. After these are completed, the ANC will hold a national policy conference in either late 2006 or early 2007 that will lay out policy recommendations to be debated at the December national conference.

14. (C) Once the national policy conference is completed, provincial ANC structures will meet again to decide on their nominees for the national party leadership, as well their delegates to the national conference. Approximately 2,000 delegates will attend the 2007 conference, with representation proportional by the number of party branches in the province. Ninety percent of delegates will be elected by the branches, while 10 percent will come from the party's youth and women's leagues. As for candidate lists, Makalima noted that in 2002 the candidate lists were largely similar at the top half, with Mbeki ranked first on every provincial list but that of Free State, where he was fourth.

15. (C) After the provincial lists are compiled, they will be sent to a special ANC veterans' committee, that will review the eligibility of the various candidates (generally a formality), allow them to accept or decline (nearly all accept), and then compile a final list shortly before the conference begins. The process becomes interesting as individuals make their final decisions over whether to seek a leadership position. There are separate ballots for the top six leadership positions and for the 60-person NEC, and candidates are not permitted to run for more than one position simultaneously. An individual who shoots for a leadership job and loses will not be a part of the decisionmaking NEC. The last battle for a leadership position came at the 1997 conference in Mafikeng, where current Defense Minister Mosiuoa Lekota defeated Mbeki loyalist Steve Tshwete for the position of party chairperson,

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which hamstrung Tshwete's influence within the party until his 2002 death. In part because party leaders feared losing influence if they lost a leadership bid, none of the top six positions was contested in 2002.

REAL BATTLES WILL TAKE PLACE BEHIND THE SCENES

16. (C) While the mechanics of leadership and NEC selection are seemingly straightforward, the selection process will depend more on behind-the-scenes maneuvering and electioneering than popular participation, according to political analyst Aubrey Matshiqi. The various camps (loosely comprising supporters of Mbeki, supporters of Zuma, and those seeking a "middle-ground" option) will battle it out in the provinces over the candidate lists and chosen delegates. Matshiqi expects it will be some time before we see indications of the directions those battles will take. The true compositions of ANC "factions" are still very unclear and their ideological positions ill-formed.

17. (C) What is clear, Matshiqi noted, is that there is likely to be a significant shakeup within the party leadership. First of all, candidate lists are highly unlikely to be as uniform as in 1997 or 2002. Jacob Zuma, for example, appears to be a lock to finish at or near the top of the KwaZulu-Natal list, but he is unlikely to do as well elsewhere. Other provincial favorite sons (or daughters) could command significant local support, such as party chairperson (and former premier) Mosiuoa Lekota in Free State or former premier Matthews Phosa in Mpumalanga. Unless party factions can hammer out their differences in advance, many of the top six leadership positions could prove contentious. If the differences are not resolved, Jacob Zuma is unlikely to continue as deputy president, while Lekota and secretary general Kgalema Motlanthe could find themselves

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completely shut out if they unsuccessfully seek the

presidency.

COMMENT

18. (C) It is far too early to say how the battles for control of the ANC will play out, although it is clear that most of the machinations will take place outside of the public eye. The provincial party conferences will bear close watching, as their results (both in terms of candidate lists and delegate selection) will have direct bearing on the national conference results. Makalima said that diplomatic delegations probably would be invited to at least some portions of these provincial conferences. Mission will follow up on this to ensure maximum coverage of party developments.
TEITELBAUM